

internal bulletin

CROSS-COUNTRY REPORTS ON THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

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MONTREAL WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT REPORT

The Women's Liberation movement in Montreal is at a very early stage of development, earlier than most other groups in English Canada and the United States. Although organized groups (French and English) have existed for about 6 months, very little progress has been made towards concrete action by the groups.

The English liberation group has, though, been functioning in a much more consistent manner than the French one. Marlene Dixon, has, since the Fall, been giving a weekly, free credit class at McGill University on women's oppression, its social and political origins. In addition, within the last couple of months "consciousness raising" groups of about 10 women each have been meeting weekly, mainly to discuss personal problems and (hopefully) to draw generalizations from these discussions. The main meetings have been held bi-weekly.

Virtually all political tendencies are in the group, although, at this time none is really dominant. The most vocal women, however, are those who have had some experience in the New Left, and as a result, the English women's liberation group has no formal structure, no steering committee, no elected leadership. This policy is a conscious one, raised mainly by those women with a New Left background, but, up to now, seemingly accepted by a majority of the women involved. The consequences of this lack of organization, of course, are obvious. There is very little real participation by most of those who regularly attend meetings and a very serious problem exists in planning, or even getting the women to accept, concrete actions. The bi-weekly meetings, almost without exception, are wasted on discussion of what functions those meetings should have. The concept of using the meeting to plan concrete action (supported by about half of those at these meetings) is artificially opposed to that of using the meetings as a discussion and/or educational arena.

In a sense, the whole concept of what a Women's Liberation movement is, and should be, is debated. Many of the women who have had experiences in the New Left (most of them bad experiences) believe that the Women's Liberation movement should be a revolutionary movement of women. Implicit in this concept is the exclusion of women who are not revolutionaries and/or socialists from the movement and, also, an unwillingness to take part in any action for Women's Liberation which could be defined as a civil rights issue, and therefore, liable to be co-opted by the capitalist system. This concept also leads to a tendency to view the Women's Liberation movement as a multi-issue movement, taking actions on issues which are general social issues, with no direct link to the liberation of women. The Women's Liberation groups' participation in the abortive all-women demonstration against the Montreal By-Law banning demonstrations - an action which demoralized a good number of women and which decimated the French group -- flowed naturally from this concept of a revolutionary women's movement. This tendency, though, constitutes a small minority of those involved in the English group.

The French group, Front de Liberation de la Femme (F.L.F.) had a healthy, action-oriented beginning. Much of its nucleus came from the ranks of the C.N.T.U. (Confederation of National Trade Unions) along with a few women from the F.L.P. (Front de Liberation Populaire). As our Comrades were not active in this group, we have only a vague idea of the early activities of this group. We had the impression that they were meeting regularly, but discovered later that they had had only 2 or 3 meetings up to the time of the above-mentioned demonstration. That demonstration, because it had nothing to do with women's liberation, and because it was obviously an attempt by the Michel Chartrand faction in the C.N.T.U. to substitute an action by women for a mass action against the by-law, was a serious defeat to the F.L.F., and succeeded in dissolving it for a while. At the beginning of February, the F.L.F., or more specifically about 8 women, began an attempt to revive the F.L.F. The group is, as before, action-oriented, but has a tendency to want action for the sake of action, without seriously determining

the validity of any action undertaken. Here, as in the English group, the same tendency, which might be characterized as "Mao-Spontaneist" exists. There is also an unwillingness to broaden the base of the group, and a tendency to want it to remain small. The women in the F.L.F. do, however, see a need for a leadership in the movement, which differentiates them from their English counterparts.

Our women Comrades in Montreal have only recently intervened in the Women's Liberation movement in a consistent way, and primarily in the English group, though we are beginning to intervene in the F.L.F. We have advanced our conception of the movement, although not consistently enough. Several Comrades have pressed for some kind of action - on a strictly women's liberation issue - as necessary to reach more women, gain publicity, and make the Women's Liberation movement a viable one. The English group has taken action twice in the first two weeks of February. Once against an offensive revue at McGill, and the other, initiated by our Movement, against the beauty contest for the Queen of the Sir George Williams University Winter Carnival. We wrote a leaflet for the latter action which gained considerable publicity.

We have decided, as there is no hostility to us in the movement, as we see the above-described tendency developing, it is time for us to put forward more strongly our concept of a Women's Liberation movement - an all-inclusive, single issue movement which takes action on issues affecting women - all women - as well as educating the women actively involved about the roots of their oppression, and the way to overcome that oppression.

KITCHENER-WATERLOO-GUELPH WOMEN'S LIBERATION REPORT

Last June, the first attempts at a Women's Liberation group was made at the University of Waterloo. The group was formed by women in the now-defunct Radical Student Movement at the Univ. of Waterloo, their initial motivation being "men are not giving us our freedom". However, during the summer, as three of our Comrades came to the meetings, the group took a new tact, and started to see the necessity for an analysis of the entire society. For about 3 months the group no longer met regularly, but in early January they revived with a showing of Salt of the Earth and a discussion. They have held a couple of seminar mornings since then. However, at the Univ. of Waterloo there are basically two groups with a third centred around Univ. of Waterloo's Integrated Studies Program. They differ mainly in tactics over the role of men. In general the members are not hostile to the Y.S.'ers and, as was demonstrated during the protest of the Miss Canada University Pageant, we were able to work well with the groups. Our obvious task here would be to consolidate the groups, mainly through actions.

At the University of Guelph, towards the end of the summer, 1969, and the advent of Guelph Student Movement, attempts were made to form a Women's Liberation group. Our Comrades played and are continuing to play an active and leading role in this group. Again, it too disintegrated until shortly before the Pageant protest. Since then it has planned to have a three-day seminar, and they obtained the funds for this (\$470) from one of the college councils (Witan). The core group at Univ. of Guelph is very militant and are anxious to enter into actions.

At Waterloo Lutheran University, the Y.S. sponsored a meeting with Colleen Lewis in late November. From that a group was formally founded in early January, and within two weeks this group was involved in organizing the Pageant protest. The mem-

TORONTO WOMEN'S LIBERATION GROUP REPORT

There are at present three Women's Liberation groups in Toronto, each of which tends to appeal to a different constituency. We are active in all three groups and have the perspective of building links between them through joint actions, etc.

THE NEW FEMINISTS - This group split from the Women's Liberation Movement about 1 year ago because they felt the Women's Liberation Movement defined itself too rigidly in Marxist terms. In this year they have acquired a large list of supporters (mailing list of about 200); carried a couple of successful actions (including the Greenacres action reported in the Vanguard) spoken to thousands of women across southern Ontario; launched a monthly paper (3 issues have appeared); and acquired a headquarters. The headquarters provides a centre for women to meet and discuss and forces the movement into a more professional operation. This dynamic record tends to hide the many problems before the group. Although the group has defined its aim - the elimination of sex roles, it has not yet come to grips with its organizational character or structure. Sharp divisions exist within the group as to whether they want to build a small cadre movement, a mass movement or something in between. There is also a bitter distrust, among certain members, of all political groups, and a belief that the struggle for women's liberation is not related to any other struggle, and that women in the Feminist Movement must promote their struggle to the exclusion of participation in any other social or political movement.

This issue has been shelved by closing the voting membership at 16 women (additional women can only join by the unanimous vote of these 16) and by allowing other women to join only as non-voting members. Business meetings of the group have been taken up for the past year in discussions on structure and on a manifesto.

Our participation has been somewhat minimal and haphazard. We are now moving more comrades in to participate in a more regular basis with the aim of opening the movement up. We are taking the initiative in organizing regular discussion groups at the headquarters on current, controversial or basic issues around women's liberation, which will make the group more interesting and relevant and bring women around on a regular basis. We are going to pick up speaking engagements for the group and write for the paper. We have met several excellent contacts through the group, and visualize that, if we succeed in opening it up, it will become an increasingly important area of work for us.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT - This group, the original one in the Toronto area, has a mailing list of about 150 and attracts between 30 and 60 women to its meetings. Although it operates a birth control centre and is working on the Abortion Caravan, the group tends to be a talk shop, with meetings often degenerating into "struggle sessions" about what is wrong with the group. It continues to be dominated by a rather sectarian but loose New Left leadership. Despite these problems it continues to attract new women. The campus sub-group at U. of T. tends to be more viable, and our Comrades along with a C.P. woman are able to provide considerable leadership. The Waterloo action (report attached) was carried mainly through the campus group with our Comrades providing the main organization and co-ordination.

We have recently taken steps to become more involved in the group - to man literature tables, to intervene in as many meetings as we can. We want our Comrades to become increasingly known and established as leaders within the group. We are pushing for the group to adopt a more serious professional attitude - establish a central address, advertise meetings, etc. and to hold some good actions.

Women's Liberation Movement (cont'd)

A Women's Liberation group has been set up at York Univ. We don't have any women Comrades on this campus at present but are doing what we can to make up for this by sending women Comrades to York Women's Liberation meetings when possible and by selling Women's Liberation literature at our tables. We are now in the process of recruiting our first woman comrade at York!

THE NDP WOMEN'S LIBERATION CAUCUS - which was set up in Toronto in December, was in many ways a product of the Winnipeg Convention. At present the group is made up primarily of women from the Waffle Caucus, including, of course, ourselves. There is a tendency among some Waffle women to want to make the group an adjunct of the Waffle caucus. However this position has not carried, and the perspective is to reach out to all women within the NDP and to use the resources of the Party where possible (e.g., meetings are usually held at the NDP headquarters). The group has defined itself as follows:

Structure of the Group - must be members of NDP to vote on policies adopted by the group. We are willing to work with other women's groups on any actions taken up. Essentially we are an action-oriented group.

AIMS

1. To work for the liberation of women in Canadian society
 - to alter the consciousness of man and women in relation to the role women are forced to play in society.
2. To take as our primary constituency the NDP
 - to get resolutions essential to women passed at Conventions.
3. To take as our basic concern the situation of working class and poor women
 - to encourage housewives to take part in actions taken up, and also try to get these women involved in discussions initiated at meetings.
4. To develop women as political persons
 - this group will support women in developing all their skills to organize and act effectively politically.
5. Socialist orientated - as socialist women seeking to change present values as a group we must have the courage to discover new ways of action, of communication, of expression, of accomplishment so that human people may emerge in a truly human society."

The group is working on a series of papers on such topics as women in the work force, abortion, day care centres, education, etc., which will be made up into a kit to be used at meetings and as a basis for drawing up a program for the ONDP Convention in the fall. The group is action-oriented and is already sending speakers to Riding Associations. It also plans to intervene firmly in a conference entitled "Women:Scene '70" which the Tory Provincial Government is holding on the question of women as consumers in March.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

At the February 21st VMC Conference, a work shop was held on women's liberation. The discussion centred on ways of winning women's liberation activists to an understanding of the crucial importance of the Vietnam issue and of the need to become involved in the Anti-war movement. The work shop made several recommendations - that there be a Women's Liberation contingent in the march; that the VMC send out a letter to all women's groups appealing to them to join the march; that there be an article in the next CVN on women's liberation and the Anti-war movement (perhaps investigating how Vietnam-induced inflation hits at the woman worker and the housewife); that the VMC consider the possibility of providing day care facilities for children for the evening part of the Ottawa action.

OUR EXTERNAL WORK

In Toronto we are identifying ourselves as the only political movement that promotes the issue of women's liberation. We are doing this through the Municipal election campaign, through our open intervention in the various women's liberation movements, and through the classes we have held on this question. In March we plan to hold a dramatic evening on women's liberation at our headquarters (to celebrate International Women's Day) and to have a forum on Rosa Luxemburg to commemorate the Centenary of her birth. The Young Socialists are currently running Joan Campana for President of SAC (Univ. of Toronto) and are developing women's liberation as a key plank in the platform. Colleen Levis was the featured speaker at Young Socialists public meetings on women's liberation at York Univ. and Univ. of Toronto. Both meetings were resoundingly successful, drawing out 250 and 75 people respectively. We are currently trying to produce more material for the Labor Challenge on this struggle, and to circulate our literature on this question more vigorously.

INTERNAL WORK

We are trying to hold meetings of the Women's Liberation Committee on a regular bi-weekly basis and Fraction meetings on a monthly basis. The Committee has the function of directing our work both internally and externally.

HAMILTON WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT REPORT

The group here was initiated by Comrades last fall after I had finished my tour for the YS/LJF. There were a few women who came to hear my talk at McMaster and some from the New Left McMaster Student Movement as well as several completely new people. The group had a few meetings, but because of particularly the opposition of the McMaster Student Movement women to the formation of the group (i.e., all but one) and the fact that at the time we had only one woman Comrade in the local, the group did not develop into a concrete group with an executive, constitution and the beginnings of a program until January. The group is composed primarily of students, but it also has several older women who work and attend night school, a couple of housewives and some university workers. We participated in the Waterloo demonstration against the beauty contest and have held several educational events including a film showing. We now have several contacts for our Movement in the group and the group as a whole accepts our leadership, by default more than the result of a political struggle. The New Left and Maoist-influenced women of the McMaster Student Movement have abstained almost totally from the activities and meetings until this week (wk. of Feb. 21st) when after a discussion on "male chauvinism" at their last business meeting, they decided to send people in order to "bring them out of the Women's Liberation Movement group and into the McMaster Student Movement". However, they were not content to send only the McM.Stdt.Move. women. Several of the leading McM.Stdt.Move. men attended the last business meeting of the Women's Liberation Movement. The policy towards men attending meetings was not clearly established because of the reluctance of not only the McM.Stdt.Move. women at the beginning, but also because of an uncertainty on the part of several less political women. The policy was established that we would have men at meetings only by consent of the women at any particular meeting. However, since then the McMaster Student Union rejected our constitution because it contained the clause on membership which left the group open only to women. The McM.Stdt.Move., believe it or not, used this formal technicality to justify having men at the meeting. A further problem was that the majority of the steering committee of the group was not present and the one McM.Stdt.Move. woman who supports the existence of the group was not there. This left Comrades and entirely new people to cope with the bores of the McM.Stdt.Move. The men did most of the talking, proceeding to attack everything we suggested the group do. They carried entirely the C.P.L. line on movements like Women's and Blacks' liberation, although none of them were actually members of C.P.L. We are misleading people, they say, by carrying on campaigns against the government policy on abortions, because the Canadian government does not have the power to change the laws. Then I tried to ignore them and finish the business, which was to organize our next action -- a teach-in on women. They accused me of railroading discussion, although the people worth talking to there were getting restless with the discussion they did not understand and were about to leave. We salvaged what we could from the meeting, but will face more such problems in the future. The major problem in getting the group off the ground seems to be the problem of getting people who can take leadership and initiative involved. The group is still loosely knit and without a cohesive program. Most are not political but are certainly moving in that direction. Those who support charity-type-setting-up of clinics themselves are not, at this time, involved in the group. We feel that more co-ordinated actions across Ontario and across Canada are essential to get groups like ours off the ground, and out of the talk-shop into action. The proximity of the Toronto groups has helped to speed up the interest here and the New Feminists Centre, in particular, will be helpful. We have actually done quite well in using the student press to put forward Women's Liberation ideas and the position of our Movement on it. In the second last issue of the Silhouette, the article I wrote for YSF in the January issue was reprinted in full.

Colleen Lewis

REPORT ON WOMEN'S LIBERATION WORK IN VANCOUVER

The 5 member YS-LSA Women's Liberation Committee this fall decided to assign one comrade to the Vancouver Women's Caucus (VWC) for the general purpose of doing contact work for our movement, selling our literature, intervening where possible, and reporting its general activities to the local and branch. In January of this year, in view of the growth of the women's liberation movement in this city and across the continent, we decided to put more forces into the area to work in VWC, the NDP, to take responsibility for developing the branch and local in this political field, and where feasible, to undertake activities in the name of the YS and the LSA. We now have the perspective of becoming more involved in the area, learning more about it, and becoming leaders in the area. The branch and local executives are presently discussing redistribution of personnel in order to increase our forces in this area.

THE VANCOUVER WOMEN'S CAUCUS

The VWC grew out of an SDU formation on SFU. Most of our women comrades who were involved in the caucus at that time were later part of the group that split, so that then we were left with no forces in that area. Since then, the caucus has moved off campus in order to orient to women more generally, and presently has a permanent office in the Labour Temple. Student women are working principally in the city group although from time to time there is some activity carried by them on SFU, UBC and VCC.

The leadership of the VWC is composed principally of our ex-comrades, (Jran, Dodie, Bev) and campus type radicals (Margaret Benston, Marcy Cohen). The core of the membership includes radical student types, and working women, some of them housewives. While the bulk of the membership would fall into the "outh" category, several of the women are middleaged. Some of the steady "core" appear to operate as independent radicals and a large number identify themselves with the Chinese revolution although to the best of my knowledge none are actually members of any organized Maoist tendency. Other political tendencies include ourselves and the IWW (insofar as they can be characterized as a tendency). A couple young women are members of the NDP, but are not seen as representing it, and the caucus as a whole does not in any way orient towards the NDP. We are the only political tendency that identifies ourselves as such, sells our paper, etc. This is not to say that other tendencies subordinate political differences, but that the movement itself is in a very embryonic stage and political differences haven't come to the surface yet. There is still general agreement in regard to demands, day-to-day tactics etc because issues dealt with to date have usually been on a very basic anti-capitalist, pro-human rights level.

Because several of the leaders of VWC received their political training in the Trotskyist movement, a lot of routine organizational work is done quite smoothly and does not pose itself as being problematic as it often does in other groups across the country with less political experience to draw on. For example, mailing lists are passed around at meetings, routine mailings are done, the office is staffed quite regularly, actions are generally fairly well publicized, publicity from the media is well utilized, educational work is carried consistently, and actions are carried out seriously and consistently. A list of actions the caucus has and is carrying should give an indication of how active, and how serious the group is.

Some actions that have been carried in Nov. and Dec. of '69:

1. A picket outside the Engineer's Club and outside Manpower, both of which are guilty of blatant discrimination against women;

2. A brief presented to Manpower;
3. A brief presented to the Commission on Human Rights hearings, and a demonstration and leafletting outside;
4. A contingent in the Nov. 15 Vietnam demonstration where some of the women chanted ultraleftist slogans;
5. A demonstration against Manpower who advertized for casual Xmas help for the Post Office, women - \$1.25, men - \$1.50. Hiring according to sex rather than qualifications, and low wages in general were the focus of the protest.

Some actions presently being carried:

1. The Pedestal a 4-8 page paper is coming out monthly, single issues and subs are being sold consistently;
2. A general campaign to get abortion laws repealed. A clinic has been set up to do free pregnancy testing and abortion counselling "under the new law". Demonstrations are being planned for Valentine's Day, and a mass demonstration in Ottawa on Mother's Day. The latter will take the form of something like a car cavalcade across the country to protest the deaths through illegal abortion. A film showing and educational on the vacuum abortion technique (used in the Soviet Union) is to be set up for medical people in the city;
3. Withholding or requesting refund of tax money which would go to supporting Canada Manpower;
4. Weekly educationals;
5. TV programs, articles for campus newspapers;
6. A protest candidate from SFU in the Waterloo University beauty contest;
7. "Women's Liberation Now" stickers to stick on ads, magazine covers, etc., that degrade women;
8. "A working women's workshop" (research and educationals at the Community Educational and Research Centre - Englerite). Some proposed projects are union organizing, research on labour history, researching the pill;
9. A teach-in on International Women's Day to which all women's organizations in the city will be invited.

Whereas occasionally these actions have been ultraleft in some aspects (eg., the demonstration outside the Commission on Human Rights had a gun in it), on the whole, actions have been centered around important issues, have been carefully explained to the public, have sought to involve as many women as possible, and have encouraged male solidarity.

WVC is open to our intervention in the sense that when we have a proposal to make, it is seriously considered by most of the women present. Yet while the Rands leadership has not attempted to exclude us, they ignore us as much as possible, have refused to speak at our forums, etc.

The serious shortcomings of the WVC are its clique leadership; its tendency to project the caucus as a group centered around a Marxist analysis of society, rather than a group centered around a set of demands; its inability to integrate the many new women with no previous political experience who are continually being attracted to WVC, but who seldom return for a second experience.

THE NDP

We have several contacts in this area, and at present a couple of women comrades who have already done some work in this area. All indications are that the NDP provides a tremendous potential for women's liberation work. We plan to work in reactivating the provincial NDP women's committee, of course along political lines and with a program for women's liberation. Feb. 7, the NDP Women are holding a public seminar on the general topic of women. We will participate and encourage contacts in the WVC to do so as well. In March, there will be a meeting to organize around the Watkins Manifesto, and we will participate in the women's panel and workshop. We expect not only that the issue of women can go a long way toward radicalizing and activating women in the NDP, by helping them work out an analysis of society, etc., but that this development can in turn serve to force the WVC to take the NDP more seriously.

YS - LSA EXTERNAL ACTIONS

This month, we held a film showing of "Women on the March" (history of the suffragette movement) which only drew out about 20 people, most of them comrades. We had hoped to attract many more people and our failure to do so was probably largely due to an inadequate publicizing of the film showing. We also held a Friday night forum on the Revolutionary Dynamics of Women's Liberation. With only a regular mailing and a small scale distribution of leaflets on the campuses and WVC, about 60 people attended, many of them new to us, and very interested in the topic.

We are planning to reserve a weekend of the spring educational lineup for the topic of women, and are hoping to arrange speaking meetings for a prominent Trotskyist women (we've written to Colleen L. about this). We are also planning some dramatic event for the Friday forum closest to International Women's Day.

Some other possibilities open to us - writing an internal paper for WVC on contact work, on the need to unite around a program rather than around a particular political analysis; writing reviews of our literature for the Pedestal; submitting a paper on Women's Liberation and the Position of Children (by Joyce M. of the NDP) to WVC, hopefully to be reproduced there, and then possibly to be reprinted by the Vanguard.

YS-LSA INTERNAL ACTIVITIES

An internal on Women's Liberation is being given in the yough, by one of the newer women comrades. A social evening is being planned for women comrades and close contacts in order to give us an opportunity to discuss problems in the area such as, How can a woman in our society become an effective revolutionary? Also, we may adopt the practice of presenting educationals regularly at meetings of the YS-LSA Women's Liberation Committee.